
A Guide to Effective Youth/Adult Partnerships on Councils, Associations, and Committees



INTRODUCTION

How can we afford to not include youth in important decision making processes of 4-H councils, associations, and committees? This type of activity provides a growth opportunity for youth and strengthens program decisions. By helping young people grow, we accomplish the very purpose for which the 4-H program exists. It is the policy of the Washington State University Extension 4-H Youth Development Program to involve 4-H youth in leadership opportunities whenever possible.

This publication is a guide for youth who serve on 4-H councils, associations, and committees as well as the volunteer and professional adults who work with them. Many decision-making groups operate simultaneously in counties, districts, and state, both formally and informally. These groups shape activities and educational programs. They decide how money will be raised and spent for the good of the program. Many, if not all, of the decisions affect the lives of youth as well as adults. Youth members can provide meaningful input, gain valuable experience, learn decision-making skills, and build working relationships with adults.

For youth to be effective on councils, associations, and committees, adults need to be supportive of the youth in every way possible. A passive attitude from adults may be interpreted by youth as meaning, "It is not important for you to participate." The participating youth need to know what the expectations of the situation, and they should have had appropriate prior experience in the 4-H program, such as local leadership before state leadership. Youth/adult partnerships can benefit everyone involved but they need to have the cooperation and support of all parties! Encouragement, open communications, willingness to serve and learn, and compromise are key components to a successful council, associa-

tion, or committee and every youth or adult who applies to serve should exercise them.

Positive steps must be taken to insure that youth are selected in a fair and open manner, that they receive adequate orientation and ongoing education, and that they are strongly supported by adults. Youth leaders can be a strong resource for planning current and future goals on 4-H councils, associations, and committees.

Benefits to Youth

Benefits to youth from serving on a 4-H council, association, or committee with adults include:

1. The positive feeling of acceptance by adults.
2. A sense of responsibility from contributing to something important and worthwhile.
3. A sense of accomplishment.
4. Valuable experience that will help in school, a career, or continued community work.
5. Expressing their opinions in the planning of youth activities.

Learning to work with adults is challenging for youth as they approach adulthood. Adults have the advantage of experience and knowledge that youth gain only through continued involvement. Four significant components of identity are important for youth:

- A sense of competence
- A sense of usefulness
- A sense of belonging
- A sense of influence

Involvement on a council, association, or committee could give youth a sense of competence by having someone trust them and give them their own responsibility. The ability to prove themselves and their maturity gives a sense of usefulness and value. Membership on a council, association or

committee gives a sense of belonging. Youth will gain a sense of influence from having their voice not only heard, but actually listened to and acted upon.

Benefits to 4-H

The benefits of 4-H participation are not limited to the youth themselves. The whole organization benefits when young people bring the enthusiasm and fresh ideas that come from seeing a situation for the first time. Youth involved effectively in decision making can benefit the organization in these ways:

1. Youth will help move the program in a relevant direction.
 2. Youth are valuable resources.
 3. The presence of youth will stimulate the group to consider the views of those for whom the program is designed.
 4. Decision making is enhanced by youth. As the nation's leading organization serving youth, we need to be the leader in forming the next generation of decision makers.
 5. Learning experiences enrich youth, forming future leaders.
1. The size of a council, association, or committee does influence its effectiveness. Large groups may bring in ideas, but a small group of nine or less is usually more effective in creating good decisions.
 2. Effective 4-H councils, associations, or committees include a sufficient number of youth. Many 4-H councils, associations, and committees are moving toward equal representation of youth and adults. You must consider the job at hand to realize what is appropriate. If you are setting youth programs or guidelines, the more youth involved the better. If you are working on business or legal matters, youth can benefit from the experience, guidance, and maturity of adults.
 3. Youth members may need a different length of service than the adult members. Other commitments may require that youth service terms be flexible.
 4. Youth members should be in at least 8th grade. However, an individual's maturity and length of leadership experience in the 4-H program may be more important than age.

Making It Work

A provision for youth membership is included in many 4-H county, district, state, regional, and national councils, associations, and committees. All youth seeking involvement in leadership at any level of 4-H are encouraged to attend their county council meetings regularly. This will help them experience active involvement in their local program and gain support of volunteer and professional adults in the program. It is equally important to maintain this involvement if youth proceed to leadership on a higher level, sharing what they learn from state and national programs with their county.

Recruiting

Recruiting strong youth candidates for a 4-H council, association, or committee differs little from recruiting adult members. These steps will help find capable and committed candidates:

1. Have a nominating committee identify appropriate youth. You may start with a list of eligible 4-H members. Select those who are knowledgeable about 4-H, communicate well with their peers, and are willing to talk and share ideas. Personally contact the candidates to determine their interest in serving. Explain the expectations of the assignment and ask for a commitment. While youth who are popular with their peers and active in

many activities may be excellent candidates, don't overlook individuals who may not currently be as active but who are willing to try something new and do a good job.

2. Select the youth members. Some counties let peers make the selections. Other counties require an open vote by all 4-H families, members or leaders. Keep the process open to make opportunities available to a maximum number of young people.

Orientation

1. New members on councils, associations, and committees must be given background information in order to help them become active and effective participants. The following items should be provided to any new member:
 - A position description
 - A copy of the constitution
 - Lists of council, association, or committee members' names and contact information
 - Minutes of previous meetings or a list of issues from the past year
 - Budget information
 - Basic information about 4-H relevant to the assignment
 - If available, enrollment trends, participation reports, and evaluation summaries may also be helpful to a new person
2. An orientation conducted by the president, committee chair, or extension staff will familiarize new members with their responsibilities and help them understand the importance of the task and the value of their participation.
3. Spend time at the first meeting making introductions and helping new members feel welcome.

Partnerships

Some people may have difficulty accepting youth/adult partnerships as a legitimate aspect of the council, association, or committee. Remember to work together. The following guidelines should help you engage the youth and adult members of your group.

Adults and youth have different ideas about what is fun and important. Even basic values may differ. Each individual has a personal frame of reference and a unique perspective. Appreciate these differences as the strength of a diverse group, not obstacles to be overcome.

Youth members may need encouragement to contribute to a group discussion, especially when they first join. Asking for their opinions will help them get started. Ask for more information if a person's idea is not clearly understood.

As issues are discussed, keep an open mind. Learn where ideas are coming from and why they are important. Look for creative solutions to problems and concerns. Avoid putting down other individuals. Focus on ideas rather than personalities, particularly when discussing controversial topics.

Give youth meaningful roles appropriate to the situation. Assigning busywork or jobs that adults do not want will not help youth members gain leadership experience. One strategy may be to pair a youth with an adult for shared responsibility. The resulting teamwork will benefit everyone.

Above all, regard everyone as a resource. They are concerned for the welfare of others. They are intelligent and knowledgeable about many things. Do not underestimate their potential.

Recognition

Appropriate recognition is important for both youth and adults serving on councils, associations, or committees. Be sensitive to the feelings of members. A poster showing the names of the council, association, or committee membership could be displayed in the extension office or during the county fair. Some counties provide a name badge for council members to wear when attending 4-H events, including the county fair. Giving people specific responsibilities is recognition that carries a strong message, "You are capable, trustworthy, and valued."

Summary

Youth leaders serving on county, state, and national councils, associations, and committees accomplish a major goal of the 4-H program: learning life skills while developing character. When youth and adults work as partners, both parties are actively participating in successfully achieving the final goal, which is to maintain, administrate, and implement current 4-H programs while creating, improving, and setting goals for future 4-H programs. Seek out and encourage youth leaders to be active on these councils, associations, and committees. Youth are our present and our future.

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